

THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims

Claims 1-21 (Cancelled).

Claim 22 (Currently Amended): A method for improving plant growth characteristics, comprising increasing, in a monocotyledonous plant, expression of an isolated nucleic acid encoding an Na⁺H⁺ exchanger (NHX) protein according to SEQ ID NO. 2, wherein said plant is grown under non-salt stress conditions, wherein the increasing expression is effected by introducing and expressing in the plant said nucleic acid having the sequence according to SEQ ID NO. 1 in the sense orientation under the control of a ~~promoter selected from the group consisting of a seed-specific promoter and a tissue-specific promoter~~, and wherein said growth characteristic is increased yield/biomass and/or modified plant architecture.

Claim 23 (Cancelled).

Claim 24 (Cancelled).

Claim 25 (Previously presented): The method according to claim 22, wherein said increased yield/biomass and/or modified plant architecture is selected from the group consisting of: increased aboveground area, increased number of first panicles, increased plant height, increased total number of seeds, increased number of filled seeds, increased total seed weight, increased harvest index and increased thousand kernel weight, each relative to corresponding wild type plants grown under non-salt stress conditions.

Claim 26 (Cancelled).

Claim 27 (Cancelled).

Claim 28 (Previously presented): The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is in the sense orientation and is under the control of an endosperm-specific promoter.

Claims 29-31 (Cancelled)

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Claim 32 (Currently Amended): The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is represented by ~~SEQ ID NO: 1~~ or a sequence capable of hybridizing therewith under stringent conditions comprising temperature of 60 degrees C. followed by washes in 2xSSC, 0.1xSDS, and 1xSSC, 0.1xSDS.

Claims 33-51 (Cancelled).

Claim 52 (Previously presented): The method according to claim 28 wherein said endosperm- specific promoter is a prolamin promoter.

Claim 53 (Cancelled).